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AUTHOR(S):

Blumberg, Mark

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Developing Creations and Creating Development

Mark Blumberg



The source of creation and creativity is closely tied to the issue of design. With regard to evolution, the argument from design -- the notion that evidence of design implies the existence of a designer -- played a seminal role in early Creationist thinking and has experienced a resurgence in the form of Intelligent Design. Curiously, biologists and psychologists routinely invoke a more subtle form of the argument from design: for biologists, the notion of genes as "blueprints" and "programs" that "hardwire" the brain to produce particular instincts has many of the same attributes of "Designer Thinking," as does many current theories concerning the role of consciousness in human behavior. The current trend among some developmental psychologists to imagine highly complex cognitive skills built into the brains of human newborns -- thus siding with nature in the nature-nurture debate -- is a natural extension of Designer Thinking into the realm of human development. In this talk, I will examine these and related issues from a variety of perspectives with the aim of showing that the antidote to Designer Thinking is rigorous, detailed analysis of the origins of biological forms, behaviors, and cognitions. A key theme of this talk will be that "freaks" -- that is, developmental anomalies -- powerfully illustrate the centrality of development to evolution as well as the creative flexibility inherent in the developmental process.

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